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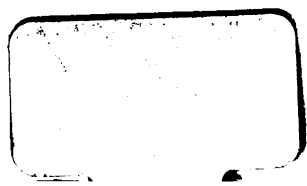
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ROUGH SHOOTING

BY

T. E. KEBBEL

Author of "MY FIRST GROUSE," &c.

WITH ILLUSTRATIONS

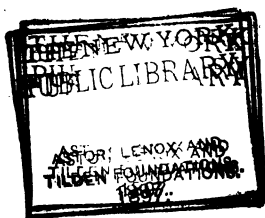
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LONDON

SWAN SONNENSCHN & CO.

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ROUGH SHOOTING

BY

T. E. KEBBEL

Illustrated

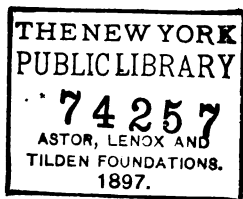


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N O T E.

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T. E. K.

ROUGH SHOOTING.

CHAPTER I.

PARTRIDGE-SHOOTING IN ANGLESEY.

NOBODY who has ever read the description of the first of September in the history of the Pickwick Club can doubt that it has a great deal to recommend it beyond the mere pleasure of shooting. The drive out in the cool of the morning; the beauty of the green English landscape, hardly showing as yet one spot upon its summer vesture; the sociability of a shooting party, and the pleasure of lunch after a fatiguing morning, are all accessories to the sport only partially experienced either by the angler or the fox-hunter. It is curious, too, that shooting, though the least accessible of all three kinds of sport to the general public, has always been the favourite vehicle for the exposure of cockney blunders. This was the

case long before the days of *Punch*; and yet the inexperienced performer must make himself equally ridiculous either with the rod or in the saddle. Perhaps it is more easy to make a caricature of a man out shooting, and to depict



his perplexity and ignorance, than in either of the other two predicaments. And certainly we have always thought that the figure of Mr. Winkle spinning round and round in a stubble-field, after the rising of a covey of partridges, and calling

out, in an agony of excitement, "Where are they, where are they? tell me when to fire," would have made a much better subject for illustration than the celebrated scene with the tall horse. But, however this may be, partridge-shooting is certainly one of the most delightful of English field sports; and if we could only forget the heartburnings which are occasioned by over-preservation of game, and the jealousies which arise out of the question of "sporting rights," the first of September would be a red-letter day indeed with all persons who have a taste for amusements of this kind. This little book is not offered, of course, to those who have not. But those who have, must often, like the present writer, be disturbed in their minds when they think of these things; and must wonder whether it will ever be possible to get rid of these drawbacks without rooting up the wheat with the tares. We shall glance at the principal objections to which shooting lies open before finishing this volume. But in order not to throw a cloud over the scenes we are about to depict, we may say at once that we hope to give a very good account of them. And more than that, we will lap the soul of the sportsman in Elysium for a few moments by taking him back to a time when these

objections had no existence. We need not go so far back as the reign of Queen Anne; though the goodness of that gracious sovereign seems, according to the late Lord Stanhope, to have extended itself even to partridge-shooting. The particular golden age we are thinking of lasted a good deal longer than that, even into the reign of Queen Victoria. Happy hunting grounds undisturbed by the progress of knowledge; thick stubbles undisturbed by the progress of agriculture; long days, and short lunches, and moderate bags—

“Et patiens operum exiguoque assueta juvenus”—

were still common in Britain when her Majesty ascended the throne of these realms fifty-two years ago this June.

But for the first of September, old style, in perfection we must go a little further back perhaps than that; if not before the rise of what Mr. Disraeli calls “the Condition of England Question,” at least before the great political convulsions, with which the second quarter of this century commenced, had clouded the mellow sunshine of that long calm day which lies between our two revolutions like a valley between mountain chains. There was a time, at all events, in the present century—we need not specify it

more particularly—when a tenant still regarded the sporting rights of his landlord as part of the order of nature ; when it no more occurred to him that partridge-shooting was for “ the likes of him ” than it did to get up into the pulpit ; when the comparatively small damage then inflicted on his crops by hares and rabbits was reckoned in with droughts and floods as something over which he had no control, and which it would be impious to murmur at ; when the parson shot over his own glebe, unworried of newspaper or bishop ; and when almost anybody who wanted to shoot could find unpreserved land to walk over, with a reasonable supply of game on it. In those piping days of social peace, under the reign of the old gods ; before “ the problems of humanity ” began to lie so heavy on men’s minds as to make them uneasy in their pleasures ; when they took the goods of life as they came, and tried to think as little as possible about the evils ; when to say that it was cruel to shoot a hare or a pheasant would have been thought as absurd as to say that a Frenchman was as good as an Englishman, and to have indicated, in fact, a similar vein of moral obliquity ; and when fox-hunter and grouse-shooter, deer-stalker and salmon-fisher, each pursued his favourite amusement without a

moment's misgiving, and wholly unsuspecting that he would ever, while the earth continued to revolve upon its axis, be charged with "immorality":—in that delightful period lay the halcyon days of field sports, when no black drop of any kind entered into the sportsman's cup; when, if he shot over his own land, he was conscious of no offence either to man, bird, or beast; or, if he shot over his neighbour's, was unharassed by the consciousness of a host of competitors, all intriguing to deprive him of his morsel of privilege. The absence of all those jealousies, misgivings, and heartburnings, which deform these latter days, must have made the first of September, we think, forty or fifty years ago, sweeter than it is now. But there are places where the old style and the old feeling still linger, and to one of these my reader is about to be introduced.

Those who have only shot partridges in what is called a partridge country, in comparatively flat and highly-cultivated districts, rich in hedgerows, hedgerow timber, and woodland, will scarcely understand what the sport is like when pursued among rocks and cliffs, on the edge of considerable precipices, and among wide broken tracts of gorse, heather, and bog. I have had some very good partridge-shooting in the island

of Anglesey over ground which exactly answers to this description; and though it certainly comes under the definition of rough or mixed shooting, it is ground on which, in a good season, large bags may be made.

Anglesey, except in one or two favoured corners, is almost destitute of wood; but beautiful views are to be obtained from the high ground in almost every part of the island; and if anything can solace an enthusiastic gunner for a temporary scarcity of birds it is the glorious panorama of sea and mountain spread out before him on all sides. Immediately on crossing the Menai Bridge, the traveller finds himself in a country which, compared with Denbighshire and Carnarvonshire, is flat and uninteresting. The soil seems black and peaty. Wide marshy flats extend on each side of the line, and pools of stagnant water replace the brooks and rivers he has left. Gradually, however, as the ground rises, it becomes more broken and diversified. Large fields of turnips and potatoes gladden his eye, and presently the bright yellow gorse, the pale pink heather, and tawny rusty fern, now taking its autumn hues, begin to clothe the rocky knolls which grow more numerous every mile. In spite of the cold colour of the stone walls and cottages,

and the absence of the rich foliage which hangs in such luxuriant masses over the Conway, the Llugwy, and the Machno, the rude and somewhat desolate aspect of the scenery has a charm of its own, and he feels that, over ground such as this, partridge-shooting may assume something of that wild character the want of which is no doubt its chief drawback, and may come more nearly to resemble grouse-shooting than it does in any part of England, or certainly in those countries which are specially celebrated for the sport. Before our journey's end is reached we have arrived in a region which may fairly be called mountainous, and look forward with eager curiosity to the doings of the morrow, when the appropriateness of the Psalmist's simile will be submitted to the test of experience.

On talking matters over after dinner, the first thing I learn from my host is, what I had suspected all along during our railway journey, namely, that pointers and setters are indispensable for the work before us. That is a highly gratifying fact, for either driving or shooting in a line with retrievers only is to our mind a very inferior form of partridge-shooting; and a glance at the nature of the ground is sufficient to show one that the latter system at all events could

certainly not be carried out in Anglesey. As we start in the morning the keeper and our host both explain the mode of proceeding which is necessary to make a good bag. The coveys must be found, broken, and scattered among the rocks and heather, and, as it is almost impossible to mark them down, staunch dogs must be used if real sport is to be had—dogs that will stand unmoved behind a big rock or wall, unseen and unnoticed till the party comes up to the spot. The cultivated patches which lie among the hills, bearing crops of grain, turnips, and potatoes, nestle very often in deep hollows or long narrow clefts, into which it is just as difficult to mark the birds down as it is among the rocks. Dogs, consequently, are always in demand, and without them some of the choicest incidents of partridge-shooting are necessarily lost.

Here we are, then, at last at the foot of a steep hill, the sides of which are stubble and the summit gorse and fern. The keeper knows of birds here; so, climbing over the walls with little suspicion as yet of the trials which await us “along of ’em,” we breast the ascent with energy, and are soon rewarded by seeing the dogs begin to draw. The birds, however, though they have not yet been shot at, get up wild out

of the short stubble and, toppling over the ridge, disappear from view. "All right," says the keeper, "we have them now, as Napoleon said of the English at Waterloo;" and cheered with this assurance we clamber on robustly till we gain the desired eminence, when to an unpractised eye affairs do not look quite so promising. Before us lies a long narrow slip of heather sloping sharply down to the edge of the cliff, and scarcely looking like the place into which a large covey of birds would drop near the end of September. Our attendant is obliged to confess that he may perhaps have been too sanguine; and the cover on being beaten yields only a brace of young birds, who, thinking themselves wiser than their parents, stopped short of the rest and now pay the penalty of their self-conceit by being promptly put to death. One falls to your own barrel, and one to your friend's, but the first bird tumbles sheer over the cliff on to the rocks beneath, and has to be recovered by means of a boy, who descends to the bottom, hovering, as it seems, on the brink of destruction at every step, but in reality without any danger, and who, when he has diminished to about the size of a terrier, picks up the bird and comes back again as if it was an every-day occurrence, which

for what we know it really may be. It is useless to pursue the covey, so we retrace our steps to the stubble-fields, and soon succeed in driving two or three more coveys into the ground below, where there is a wide expanse of various kinds of cover, and sport is certain.

It soon begins. Attention is directed by the boy to the position of Blanche, the white setter bitch, who is standing fast in a little hollow formed by two projecting boulders, and only lightly feathered with fern and long grass. Cautiously we approach, and the bitch, more cautiously still, moves forward. The birds have evidently alighted here, and run through a little opening at the other end into the turnips just beyond. Each man mounts on one of the large stones, and instantly a great covey is on the wing, and all for a moment is noise, confusion, and smoke. When order is restored we find that three birds are killed, and that the rest have gone away in twos and threes to the long fern some 300 or 400 yards off. Now comes the sunny side of the peach. Blanche and Rose find bird after bird, each backing the other—one of the prettiest sights in the world—and bird after bird goes down before the steady barrels brought to bear upon them. Three brace are picked up without

a blunder ; and before we turn round again our host remembers that the long grass which grows close under the stone walls is a favourite place for scattered birds, and as we come suddenly round a corner four or five more bustle out together almost from between the stones, and in less time than it takes to write the words three more are added to the bag. And so we go on, finding the birds for the most part in the potatoes, and driving them among the rocks, where they fall easy victims to a moderately good shot who can only keep himself cool.

But come, this is dry work, as the dashing Mr. Smangle observes. We have got nine brace, it is half-past one, and we have reached a capital spot for lunch, with a rock at our back to keep off the wind, plenty of dry fern to sit upon, and a lovely scene stretched out before us, such as the eye of the partridge-shooter is rarely privileged to gaze upon. On the right lies the Irish Channel, blue flecked with white, and gleaming far away in the sunshine. The eye can follow the line of coast for some distance, and see the fringe of foam which bursts over the sunken ledges, curling round the headlands, and making the deep blue of the ocean still deeper by the contrast. In front lies the Snowdon chain,

visible nearly from Penmaenmawr to the west coast of Carnarvonshire, the monarch himself distinguished by his two peaks with the little dip between, sometimes veiled in mist, and sometimes showing clear against the sky, the ruggedness of the outline softened down by the gray and purple tints which colour the entire range.

Here, if anywhere, is the spot for repose, contemplation, and a modicum of chicken pie, to be washed down by any liquor that is handy—spring-water, claret, cider, bitter ale, or, if there is any feverishness in the system, a little hock and soda. Then for those who are smokers comes the necessary pipe, the half-hour dedicated to playful, if rather highly-flavoured, anecdote, and the ten minutes usually consumed in considering if it is time to move on. At length, however, a fresh start is made; guns are resumed, cartridge-bags are reshouldered, and the dogs gambol about as if delighted that all that nonsense is over. The whole party moves forward to a still higher range of rocks, beyond which lies a large rushy bog, and beyond that again stubble and gorse and mangold to the end of our beat.

The sport of the afternoon is necessarily to

some extent a repetition of the sport of the morning, but it has its distinctive incidents nevertheless. As we skirt the bog we get three or four good shots at snipe, and add a widgeon to the bag. A covey of birds, flushed in a common-place turnip field which might have lain in the middle of Northamptonshire, makes straight off for the sea-shore, and for the first time we see partridges shot from among the rough crags and stones which the receding tide has left dry. This is a novel experience—shooting partridges on the sands, which have been hitherto associated in our minds exclusively with bathing machines and donkeys. But it is needless to add that we met with neither the one nor the other on this wild rocky coast, and that even the domestic partridge acquires all the dignity of wildness by being found in company with the sea-birds which wheel and scream about our heads. Where the cliff is rather lower, and the sides are covered with long coarse grass, the birds lie well, but only a native would think of looking for them there, and when they disappear over the cliff they look exactly as if they were going right out to sea. Partridges, it seems, are fond of seaweed, and the stubbles where it is used for manure are always their favourites. There is one dis-

advantage in shooting close to the sea on ground where there are no trees, and that is, the often dazzling character of the light. The patches of sea which gleam under the sun like glass combine with his unbroken rays to produce a glare which is perfectly blinding, and if the birds, as they often do, fly right into it, the best shot may be pardoned a few mishaps of which, under other circumstances, he would feel grievously ashamed. On these treeless cliffs, with a bright sun and a stiff breeze to carry the birds down wind, partridge-shooting presents difficulties which, to the unpractised sportsman, are rather formidable. When the wind, the waves, and the sky all seem to fight against him he will have need of all his nerve, all his confidence, and all his temper to make head against them. We miss many birds on our afternoon beat owing to the above circumstances; and as misses always generate misses, for an hour or two the shooting is rather unsteady, and our bag does not increase as fast as could be wished. At four o'clock we have only twelve brace.

But now the sun is on the turn, the air has grown cooler and fresher, the coveys are out in the stubbles, and show themselves in quick succession. Few are killed as they rise, for the

ground is bare, and they are all either out of shot or else so far off that it is wiser not to shoot at them. But as they are gradually dispersed among the stones and gorse and the strips of potatoes and mangolds which are everywhere intermingled with them, the best sport of the day begins. We have our backs to the sun ; the birds lie well, and get up either singly or in twos and threes at a time, and we feel once more that we are master of them—that indescribable sensation which, except when a man experiences, he never shoots his best. Both begin again to kill steadily ; now and again a bird gets off ; but we have no runners, and that is the surest test of good shooting. The only thing that mars our enjoyment is the necessity of for ever climbing over the abominable stone walls which here, as in Wales, run across the hills in all directions. Every quarter of an hour, or at least every twenty minutes, we are brought up by one of these obstacles, often more than five feet high, and composed of loose stones, of which the jagged ends stick out at the top, and make it impossible for you to sit and slide down. They are certainly most abominable fences, but we would not have missed one spectacle which they afforded—namely, the red dog balancing himself on one of

them, and pointing in full sporting attitude at a covey of birds just below. That was a sight not to be forgotten, and completely restored the good humour which barked knees and fingers and ever-aching muscles were beginning to disturb. Up gets the covey; two birds drop, and to see our canine friend down charge upon the wall is almost better than seeing him point.

These two birds make 19 brace, and we had only reckoned on getting 20, but the shades of evening are falling; the last stubble has been beaten; and the adjoining rocks and bogs thoroughly explored. There remain only two or three small patches of turnips to be still tried, where it is highly improbable that any covey will be found at that hour of the night. But after they have been driven about all day, odd birds may be found anywhere till nightfall; and we are hardly in the first piece of turnips before a single bird is knocked over. The excitement now becomes intense. Shall we get the other? This lot of ground is beat out, and we try the next with grave faces. But ha! what has Blanche got in the corner there? To ho! and she stands as stiff as marble close to the hedge side. Before both guns can get up the birds rise—three of them—with monstrous noise

and bustle, out of the ditch bottom. Now or never is your chance. With a feeling akin to agony you see that you have missed your first ; but another one is still skimming along the hedge within shot, and, with a last despairing effort, you succeed in covering him properly, and bring him down dead at forty yards. Hurrah ! the job is done ; but in giving vent to your feelings before putting in another cartridge you have acted unwisely, as your voice puts up another bird right in front of you, which, however, is accounted for by your host who has now reached the scene of action, and all agree that the day is at last over. Twenty brace and a half, two hares, two rabbits, a leash of snipe, and a widgeon are the bag ; and quite enough, too, for two guns ; so now home for a bath, and then to the game soup and Welsh mutton with what appetite we may.

CHAPTER II.

A WILD PHEASANT.

WHEN our grandfathers were boys, looking forward to the month of October with all the enthusiasm of novices, the greater proportion of pheasants shot in this country were what we should now call wild pheasants ; that is to say, they were not reared under hens, and looked after as carefully as barn-door fowls. A certain number might be brought up in this manner, as some partridges are now ; but the majority were hatched in the woods, grass, and standing corn, and retained through life all the character of wild creatures. In those days it is easy to understand why there was so much pheasant-shooting in October. Woods, generally speaking, were much larger than they are now ; and "rides" had not been cut in them for the purpose of either hunting or shooting. Consequently, after the pheasants had once taken to the big woods, it was difficult to get at them ; and it became necessary to bag what you could

while they still lingered in the copses and hedgerows round the immediate neighbourhood of their birthplace. The conditions of pheasant-shooting have now so entirely changed that



hardly anyone thinks of making a bag before the leaves are off the trees and the birds can be got at in covers arranged for the purpose. Wild or tame, by the end of November they will generally have got together in these retreats,

and are then slaughtered by the hundred, as we read in the newspapers. But whenever a hen pheasant has brought up a brood or "nide" of young ones in some remote spot, to which neither fox, cat, crow, nor weasel has happened to penetrate, here, during the month of October, the pursuit of these birds assumes in the eyes of many sportsmen its most alluring aspect—becomes, in fact, the very poetry of pheasant-shooting. A rather wild rough country is required for the enjoyment of it—a country where agricultural improvements have not been carried very far; where thick double hedges and deep ditches overrun with brushwood are still to be found; where little bits of copse fill up the corners of the fields; where the ground is undulating, and tiny brooks trickle through the bottoms, forming every here and there little pools, overshadowed by the thorn, the ash, or the hazel—spots which pheasants love, and near which, if hatched in the neighbourhood, they may constantly be found till comparatively late in the season. The scene of action should not be too far from some preserve, or you will get no pheasants; nor yet too near, or the keeper will claim them as his own, and a standing feud be the result. Let them be genuine wild birds

whose parents very likely were hatched in some luxurious abode, but who have wandered away, like true Bohemians, preferring their crust of bread and hollow tree to being "shepherded" by the keepers.

The first news of the presence of such visitors on your little sporting domain is a moment of delight. We are supposing the case of a man who owns or rents the shooting over two or three farms not large enough to carry a keeper, but enough to give him fair partridge-shooting in a good season. Ten or twelve brace of pheasants in the course of the autumn form a substantial addition to his sport, and many such a man is well satisfied to get half the number. Well, you hear of them, perhaps, towards the end of August. They have been seen on the edge of a large piece of barley upon the brow of the hill, near, but touching your boundaries. While that barley stands they are tolerably safe from any neighbouring shooter, as they are sure not to stray far from it. When it is cut, then comes the anxious moment. There are some beans still standing on your own ground, and all about is plenty of such cover as we have just described. Some, doubtless, will get killed before the legal day; but you determine, and

wisely, to make no deliberate attempt to bag them before the 1st of October. It is well to set a good example in such matters, for game nowadays needs all the protection it can get. Still, when you are walking the beans for a covey of partridges, or beating hedgerows for the scattered birds, if a pheasant should get up before you in September, we will not say but what there is some excuse, especially in a young hand, for adding him to the bag. "I am not scrupulous, but I am circumspect," was the remark we once heard made by a veteran sportsman, who meant exactly what we have said—namely, that what it was *pessimi exempli* to do openly and of set purpose, might be a venial offence if done under sudden temptation and when nobody was near to be corrupted by the spectacle. Still, it is best to be on the right side; and we have no word but one of the strongest censure for the miserable pot-hunter, who, if he hears of some pheasants in his standing corn, will go and shoot them down without mercy on the 1st of September, before they have got their tails. That is no real sport. But a certain class of shooters think much of a pheasant merely because it is a pheasant; while, on the other hand, the pot-hunter glories in the

idea that he has stolen a march upon his neighbour. No, no ; this kind of butchery is a sad mistake. But give these same young poults time to grow to a decent size, and put on their distinctive plumage : let them have dispersed themselves among the double hedgerows, and rough, reedy, uncultivated ground ; and then, indeed, there may be more legitimate joy over one pheasant brought to bag than over many partridges.

The best time of day to get at a wild pheasant is morning or evening, because his scent will then be fresh upon the stubbles where he has been feeding, and which, perhaps, he has only just left at the sound of your footsteps. But if you are resolved to beat the ground carefully, the hour does not very much signify. A steady yet eager and indefatigable spaniel is the dog wanted for the work, and two guns will be enough. You will begin, of course, with your outside fences, and beat all round before you approach the middle of your ground, and the neighbourhood of that sacred barley stubble, the *prædæ cunabula vestræ*. You will naturally not expect to come upon your game all at once. You are trying a long, winding hedge, consisting chiefly of ash and oak stubs, hanging over a very

deep ditch full of brambles : the very place for a pheasant to lurk in, and one from which it is difficult to make him rise. Marquis trots knowingly along the bank, occasionally stopping to poke his head into the grass, as if the last whiff of air that touched his nostrils had something suspicious in it. But on he goes again ; and hope deferred is almost beginning to make you nervous, when—see !—he suddenly makes a cast out into the stubble, and with nose close to the ground begins to twist about backwards and forwards with the utmost excitement and absorption. You know that if this violent sniffing process had been produced by partridges, they would have got up before now, at this season of the year. It can be but one thing. By degrees the dog works back to the ditch, runs along it for a few yards, and then makes a sudden stop, peering into it motionless, with ears erect, and in a tremor of satisfaction. This only for a second ; then he makes a little kind of spring forwards, and, with a noise of pinions that you fancy might be heard across the field, up rises out of the brake a fine young cock pheasant and sails rapidly away at right angles. You are excited, but not flurried ; and, covering him well at a fair distance, drop him dead upon the spot.

Marquis, with pleasure broadly depicted on his countenance, brings back the bird, and you resume the march.

Nothing more along that hedge; but as you turn through a gateway into some thick clover, a likely place for pheasants when they have done feeding, you are both taken by surprise by the old hen getting up right under your feet and topping the adjoining hedge. Bang! and bang! go the guns; but she is not down. To put an end to the bad language which immediately ensues, your attendant pledges his honour that she is hard hit, and that you will have her in "that er copse". The statement is partly conjectural, but is borne out by facts. The bird has managed to reach the shelter of a little clump of trees and bushes about two hundred yards off, but cannot rise again. One gun goes round to the other side, and in goes Marquis. Presently a slight rush and flutter is audible; and Marquis, who has pulled out his quarry from under a little bunch of thorns, reappears with it in triumph, though you allow it is more than you deserve.

You now turn inwards, and, crossing a fallow in the direction of the aforesaid barley-field, pass a disused gravel-pit overgrown with oak, ash,

briars, and underwood of all kinds. Here, as you look through the branches right down the steep bank, something glittering catches your attention. You look again, and at once recognise a pheasant crouching close to a thorn, and manifesting no intention of moving if he can possibly help it. A silent gesture brings your companion to your side ; another shows him the bird of Colchis at his feet. A kick of the brambles and up he jumps, sailing round your friend's head in a style which sometimes makes a man miss. Not so now, however. The man is on his mettle : he follows him steadily till the right moment, then pulls the trigger, and the splendid fellow drops into the bushes down below. Another labour of love for Marquis, and on you jog. Our readers, however, may perhaps be less enthusiastic and not care to jog much further ; so we will take them at once to what you hoped to be the hot corner of your little domain. This is a long belt of coppice touching on one side the cornfield where the birds were bred, and shelving down abruptly on the other to a nice stream of water. Young elms and ash, with a few hollies and hazels, form the cover, and you have to take it first along the top, and then back along the bottom.

You move nothing at first ; but the pheasants are sure to run as long as they can, and it is not till you get down to one of the bottom corners, and let the dog go, that you can get any shots. He is soon down among the thick stuff by the water's edge ; and up goes one bird like a rocket, too swift to give a chance. Away goes another over the brook, and is clean killed. Before you have finished the coppice you have flushed another out of some tangled briars, in which he narrowly escaped being caught, and killed him well as he rose over the tree-tops. Another gets up as you are just getting through the hedge, and is missed by both. But never mind ; you are tired, and want half-an-hour on the turf. Well, there is the boy with the basket ; and now turn out the bag : two brace and a half of really wild pheasants, picked up in the course of three hours, with a brace of hares and two couple of rabbits. Now this has been real sport. To kill a pheasant after this fashion requires great patience, knowledge of the bird's habits, good nerve, and steady shooting. Pheasants are not such easy things to hit as the readers of *Punch* may imagine ; and our two friends whose exploits we have just recorded have every reason to be satisfied.

CHAPTER III.

OUR BROOK—SNIPE AND DUCK.

OUR brook was one of those many little streams which would be rivers if they could, but can never sustain the part long enough. Here and there it swelled out into considerable proportions, with long reaches some seven or eight yards in width, and big holes at the corners eight or nine feet deep; elsewhere the two banks nearly touched each other, and the water barely trickled through a tiny channel choked with rushes, so that a respectable ditch would have disdained to own kindred with it. More commonly it wound its way through the meadows at a width varying from three to six yards, but always fringed with a thick border of rushes, always pursuing a very tortuous course, and oftener than not overhung by ancient willows and patriarchal thorns, which intermingled their branches and dipped into the water together. Sometimes it ran between steep banks, and sometimes quite level with the grass, having boggy ground on each side of it. From

its mouth to its source was probably by the brookside some forty miles (as the crow flies twelve or fifteen), and I had the liberty of shooting and fishing over about five or six miles of the best part of it. When I first remember it, as a boy of ten years old, it abounded in coarse fish—pike, perch, roach, chub, eels, and gudgeon. The pike and eels were celebrated; but I used to have more sport with the perch and chub, running from half a pound to a pound and a half in weight, and occasionally higher still. Such was our brook from an angler's point of view; but though fond of bottom fishing, I early developed a passion for shooting, beginning with tomtits, going on to fieldfares; and at last, when I was about fourteen, devoting myself steadily to the brook, where for a long time I shot only rats and water-hens, till one blissful and ever-memorable day, after shooting fruitlessly at snipe for nearly the whole Christmas holidays, one was hit at last, and turning up his little white waistcoat, dropped dead upon the grass a yard or two from the opposite bank. Our brook here was too wide and full to jump, so I was obliged to run round by the nearest bridge, more than half a mile distant, trembling all the time lest somebody should have picked him up, and, running breath-



SNIPES SHOOTING.

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less to the spot, found him, safe and sound—my first snipe!—a moment in the life of a schoolboy, whom nature intended for a sportsman, not to be forgotten in any after triumph, academic, professional, or social!

It was some time before I shot another, and longer still before I “got into the way of it,” so as to feel instinctively which way the snipe was going to “Zed,” as some old shooters call it, and to pull just at the right moment; but I never had enough practice to become a crack snipe shot, and was always well satisfied if in a morning walk I killed two out of three.

For an inland county, without bogs or marshes, our brook afforded rather good snipe shooting. I have heard an old keeper describe what it was in his younger days, which must have meant sixty or seventy years from the present time; and a relative of my own has told me that he often killed eight or ten couple in a morning, and on some occasions more than that. I think that when I myself first used to go down the brook there were snipe enough, could I only have hit them, to have enabled a reasonably good shot to get quite as many as this. But by the time I grew up and began to shoot pretty fairly the land had been drained, the channel of the brook in

many places had been cleaned out and deepened, and many of the favourite haunts of this dashing little game bird had been destroyed or spoiled. The most I ever killed in one day was fourteen. But I only did that once, and I was always very well contented with half the number.

The beginning of November was the time for their arrival; and no matter what the temperature, there were always some to be found about that date. But the first hard weather used to bring them in the greatest numbers. This is not the case everywhere, but it was so in our brook. Then, when the water was low enough to leave a narrow margin of soil between itself and the rushes; when the mud was just crisped with frost, and the withered weeds, all powdered with rime, stood up stiffly about a foot from the ground; when the sky was dark and leaden, and not a breath of air stirring—then was the time for sport. The birds had been driven inland from ground more hardly frozen, and they stayed with us till our own was either in the same condition, or else completely thawed. There were never any great number about for more than two or three days together. But for that space of time there were occasionally, even in later years, a good many.

Let the reader, then, picture to himself an ordinary midland-counties landscape: a country-house girt with elm and ash, situated on a rising ground, sloping down at a gentle angle to a long stretch of meadow land, through which flows the brook aforesaid, its course marked out by the willows, but the water only visible now and then. The hedges which divide the meadows from each other run into it at irregular intervals, the ditch-banks wherever the land is ill-drained being favourite places for snipe. The ground is perfectly hard, and if it is a hoar-frost the trees and hedges are thickly coated with a feathery white robe, which at a little distance it is difficult to distinguish from snow. But the effect is more beautiful than snow, and when the sun gleams out for a moment the scene is like fairyland. The air is keen and fresh, but there is no wind and no sun, and not a drop falls from the branches to indicate any change in the temperature. This is as it should be; for as snipe always fly against the wind, it is difficult to manage them if there is anything like a strong breeze. If you walk against the wind yourself, they go straight away the moment they rise, the most difficult shot of all. If you walk down the wind, especially when the ground crackles under

your feet, they are apt to take alarm too soon and rise wild. A perfectly still day, therefore, is the best for this kind of sport ; and to-day we ought to do well.

Making our way down from the house, we soon approach the water's edge, and cross it by a wooden bridge, in order to reach some favourite ditches on the other side before taking straight alongside of it. Getting through a gap in one of the hedges running at right angles to the brook, and hearing a snipe get up behind us in the process, we find ourselves in a rough swampy kind of meadow with patches of rushes scattered about it, and fenced on the left by a hedge running parallel with the stream, but so crooked at the same time that it forms numerous little bays or inlets, enabling you to steal quietly round the corners and come upon your game unawares. Many an October partridge have I killed out of these little nooks. The hedge-bank, and what there is of a ditch, are quite rotten, and a strip of black oozy soil runs along it all through the meadow. The hedge protects it from the cold to some extent, and it is now just in that half-frozen state which the snipe love. I have not advanced half-a-dozen yards from the gap before there is a sudden rush of wings, followed by a succession of

shrill, defiant cries, and five or six little brown and white objects are dancing in the air all round, before and behind, to the right and to the left, till the whole wisp, reuniting higher up in the air, make off for some other favourite haunt.

On these occasions, unless the snipe rise very favourably indeed, you will do well not to think too much about a double shot. The birds, with the trees to favour them, have greatly the advantage of you ; but you may be on your guard for a laggard who has not risen with the rest, and who is very likely to get up while you are putting in your cartridge. That is my own plan. I pick out one bird just as he is crossing the hedge and his dark-brown back stands out well against the white twigs, and have the satisfaction of seeing him topple over on the other side. There is another going away to the right just within reach, but a very long shot nevertheless, and, acting on the maxim aforesaid, I forbear to fire, and stand quite still, to see whether the calling of the birds overhead will spring another from the ground. I am not disappointed ; up jumps a fine one just behind me, and, offering a beautiful cross shot, is laid low like his fellow, just as Marquis is returning with the first victim in his mouth. I put up three more before leaving the ditch, and

get another shot, which I miss, and then turn down to the brook, so far not ill-satisfied.

Our brook now flows, or rather trickles, for some distance under a roof of willows, which meet overhead and rarely cover a snipe. Passing this by, I hurry on to the more open ground, where the banks are clear of trees, and merely bordered with the narrow fringe of frozen rushes, which I have before described. Year by year the snipe come back to the same places if they remain the same, and I know within twenty yards where I am likely to find one. Chuck! There he goes, right away in front. Bang! and then another bang! and yet he is not down. I see, however, from the peculiar motion of his wings and his slower flight, that he is hit, and presently he descends slowly and gradually, very unlike the sharp perpendicular pitch of a sound bird, into a ditch some two hundred yards away. Now comes the question, Will he get up again or not? It is better, at all events at first, to keep Marquis to heel and walk up to the place, in case he tries another flight. Unluckily he has dropped in the hedge itself, and won't move. There is no help for it. The dog must find him. He knows what is up well enough, and at once gets on the other side of the hedge to put him out to his master.

Suddenly he makes a short pause, and with ears erect looks hard into the briars. Then a little pounce and a flutter, and away lops our long-beaked friend on the wrong side, just high enough and fast enough to escape the spaniel, and makes good his retreat to an adjoining osier-bed, where he is finally lost.

Resuming our walk, we come to a meadow where the banks are in good order for snipe, but where bushes and trees—not arching over the brook, but projecting into it—intercept the view, and make it safer to back the bird than the gun. Shooting at a snipe here will be something like a snap shot at a rabbit in cover, so quickly does the bird put a blackthorn or a willow between himself and the advancing gunner. We shall soon see. Here is a bend in the brook, and a patch of rushes safe to hold a snipe; but you must catch him before he gets round that thick bush which leans over at the next corner, about twenty yards farther on. Mark! There he goes, twisting in and out, and round the corner like a flash of lightning. But all in vain!

“Nequidquam patrias tentasti lubricus artes.”

A charge of No. 7, adroitly aimed between the bush and the bird, so that half goes into the brambles and half into the outside twigs and

pursues its deadly path unchecked, just overtakes him as he gives another twist, and tumbles him into the middle of the stream. This is probably one of the most satisfactory shots which we shall make all day. A snipe cut down



in this manner is worth three killed in the open meadow, and you receive him from the faithful Marquis with proportionate pride and exultation.

An hour has now passed, and we have bagged

a leash. The day is still all before us, and we may reasonably expect to treble it. Walking on now by the brookside, now turning away to try a favourite ditch or pit, now marking one down in a bit of wet plough or near the mouth of a spring—the morning and afternoon glide rapidly away, and on turning home at dusk, after a walk of some four hours, you find in your bag six couple of snipe, a brace of hares which haunt the waterside at this time of the year, and a few odds and ends in the shape of a water-rail, a moor-hen, and a fine young wood-pigeon which flew out of one of the pollard willows. You have shot fairly, bagged twelve, lost one, and missed five, one or two of which you ought never to have shot at at all. The day has not been a brilliant one, yet you have had real sport. And in describing it I have merely been describing, for the benefit of others like myself, what I used to consider good sport once upon a time, and which I would give one of my ears to get back again now.

At an earlier date than the above sketch refers to, snipe used to be found in considerable quantities in the large pasture-fields in the mid-land counties. These are all ridge and furrow, and in the old days water stood in the furrows

nearly all the winter. Then, if they sloped down towards a stream so that the water did not freeze, they were favourite resorts of snipe, who, as fast as they were put up at one end of the field, dropped again at the other; and I have heard old men say they could shoot in one big field about seventy or eighty acres all day long. This was more like shooting in an open bog, where I have always thought it much easier to kill snipe than it was down our brook, where they have so many things to dodge between. But of course a snipe bog is the real place in which to see snipe-shooting to perfection; and I suppose an Englishman who has not shot snipe in Ireland has no more right to talk about them than an Irishman who has not shot partridges in England has to talk about *them*. But as there are plenty of Englishmen in this predicament, I have not been afraid of illustrating this exciting sport under much humbler circumstances.

I don't know that any rules can be laid down for making a man a good snipe shot. To the steady nerve and correct eye, essential to good shooting of every kind, he must add great quickness, so that his gun may be thrown upon the bird almost as soon as it rises, and the happy moment secured before it has got too far. Let

men say what they will, when a snipe has got forty yards' start it requires an unusually good shot to stop him ; and I believe that an average shot would miss more than half at that distance. The one art to be acquired by practice is the art of divining, as it were, the bird's movements, and feeling instinctively, without thinking about it, which way he is going to twist. How often one hears men say, "I was dead on that bird, but he turned just as I pulled". Exactly so ; but the crack shot nine times out of ten shoots him just at that moment, hand and eye guiding him unconsciously to press the trigger at the right second. This habit may be acquired by constant practice ; and without it all snipe-shooting, like rabbit-shooting, is mere haphazard. With other birds it is different. When once "on" to a partridge or a grouse the shooter pulls at once, without being exposed to the sudden zigzag to which the snipe so often owes his safety. In fact, he is not a straightforward bird ; and a degree of cunning is necessary in coping with him not called for by any other kind of feathered game.

People sometimes fancy that woodcocks are difficult to shoot. But this is a mistake. Their surroundings make the difficulty, not their own

movement. Let a woodcock get up from under an ash-stump or a low holly bush, where there are no trees or high underwood, and the merest tyro ought to kill him. The certainty that the tyro will miss him arises from the unusual excitement which a woodcock generally produces in even the most experienced sportsman, and which in a novice amounts almost to agitation. Of course, when a cock gets up in the middle of a wood, his way of gliding between the trunks of the trees or skimming over the tops of the hazels, with the downward flight peculiar to himself, *does* make him a more difficult shot than a pheasant; but in the open he presents no special difficulty if the man will only keep cool.

Woodcocks do not necessarily lie in moist or wet places, like snipe. They move to their feeding-ground at dusk, and in the daytime are found in the thickest woods wherever there is a sheltered slope, especially if there is plenty of dwarf holly in the cover. Oddly enough, my first woodcock did not make the same impression on me as my first snipe. I was at Oxford at the time, and I shot him during the Christmas vacation while on a visit to some friends in Lincolnshire. He had been hanging about the place for some days, and a noted shot in the neighbourhood had missed

him twice. We were shooting rabbits in an ash-planting when I heard a little chuck, and became aware of a beautiful speckled bird with a long beak making off between the clumps. As I was out of sight I was not so nervous as I might have been ; and, getting a clear view of the cock for a few seconds, pulled at the lucky moment, and knocked him over stone-dead. The man who had missed him dined with us that evening, and I was the hero of the hour. He tried hard to bring me down to his own level by a running fire of chaff. But it was all in vain. The young ladies were on my side ; and a whole college of wit-crackers would not have made any impression on my self-esteem for the moment. The woodcock, I remember, was brought in after dinner at the special request of my rival, who again tried hard to put me out of conceit with myself by ironical exaggeration of my skill. The bird was unanimously pronounced a very fine one ; and for myself I think to this day that I have never seen one like it, and that all other woodcocks have been but jack-snipes in comparison.

Of the immigrant snipe and woodcocks found in this country—for numbers of course breed here—there is a first and second flight—in November that is, and in February ; and I remember

that the very last time I was down our brook I killed two couples of snipe on Valentine's Day. I have several times seen four or five woodcocks killed in a day during the first week in February, both in Hampshire and in Sussex, though many sportsmen are reluctant to shoot them so late in the season, as they are very early breeders, and have been seen sitting on their eggs in the woods near Hastings before the end of the month. The woodcock and the raven are, I believe, the two earliest British birds to pair.

In the inland counties, and especially along the running brooks and small rivers which wind through the midland meadows, you rarely have a chance at wildfowl, except in a very hard frost, which, of course, never lasts many weeks without a deep snow. Our brook was always good for a duck during such weather as this. But a winter's walk in the snow has been described too often to be drawn over again here. The landscape then is more weird and wintry-looking than it is in a hoar-frost, though less delicately beautiful. As the snow drops off the thorns, the hips and haws, in orange, scarlet, and crimson, shine through the broken masses of pure white, and produce a very bright effect. But on the whole the aspect of the country at such a time is

more cold, bleak, and pitiless than it is before the snow falls, and makes one think more readily of the good fires and warm rooms and cosy dinner that await us on our return. But this doubtless is not the duck's opinion, who is very well satisfied with his own dining-room, and has not the slightest desire to be introduced to ours.

These birds with a few teal, and sometimes a few widgeon, come to the unfrozen streams to feed, and some remain there all day. But they are, of course, very wild, and of the few that you may find in a walk of three or four miles still fewer will rise within shot. However, if you know the likely places, you will seldom have a blank day, if no one has disturbed the water before your arrival. As the object of the ducks in coming up these inland brooks is to find unfrozen water, the places to look for them are, of course, those where it is well protected from the frost, either by deep overhanging banks, by an old hollow tree, or by a clump of bushes. Wherever there is a sharp bend, and consequently a sharp current which rejects the embraces of the frost, or where a smaller brook or ditch empties itself into the main stream, you have a good chance of finding fowl. One advantage of the snow is,

that you can steal upon them very quietly, and the best plan is generally to make a slight detour when you approach such a spot as we have mentioned, and then to walk straight down upon it, not to approach it by the bank. Then as you softly but rapidly get near to some snug corner where a tree bent double with age, or a straggling blackthorn bush hangs over the confluence of two little rushy streamlets, your dog at heel, and both he and yourself in a state of nervous expectation, suddenly you hear the welcome splash and quack, and straight up into the air shoot three dark objects, and wheel over your head preparatory to going straight off. Two ducks and a mallard. Down comes one of the ducks upon the frozen snow, and away goes the other with her mate. But your second barrel has done its work too. The mallard is hard hit. He gradually lags behind the duck, and, lowering his flight, comes down again at last in a ditch perhaps about a quarter of a mile off. But it is on the other side of the brook. How to get over is the puzzle. The ice won't bear, and to go up to your middle in that sort of weather is no joke. However, you must risk it; and eventually, by means of a lucky jump, break through upon the other side in water not above your calves.

Now it is Marquis's turn, for wounded ducks lie very close indeed, and you could not mark the place exactly. Luckily the hedge is a low one, so it does not much matter which side he goes out, and your spaniel hunts the ditch with a full consciousness of the importance of his mission. There is a rustle in the reeds, and out scrambles the bird, this time without any quacking, and tries to make a fly of it, straight in front of you. You fire, and his troubles are over; and your dog brings him up to you with an expression upon his honest and sagacious countenance which gives a new charm to success. Now what would you give in exchange for this couple of ducks? Have you not had real sport in bagging them; and does not the very weather itself make you think better of yourself for doing it? There are few moments, we think, when a man feels better satisfied with himself than when he sits down to take off his wet boots after a long tramp through the snow, rewarded by the kind of bag we have described.

Another kind of sport to be had in perfection in a deep snow, and at no other time, is shooting French partridges out of hedgerows. Generally speaking, the only way of killing any number of

these ignoble fowl is by driving ; but in a heavy snow they cannot run, and if you can get them, as you easily can, to take to the ditch bottom, they will lie till a dog turns them out. With a gun on each side of the hedge, both being steady shots and used to the sport, ten or twelve brace may readily be killed in a day where the birds are at all plentiful. But they puzzle a novice. They burst out of the snow-covered briars with a loud noise, and then fly so clumsily and awkwardly that the very ease of the shot makes you miss it, unless you are used to the style. But a couple of practised shots may do great execution in this way ; and nobody can pretend that you have not a perfect right to kill French partridges in any way that you can. They never behave themselves like gentlemen, and deserve no quarter ; and a few days' shooting of this kind avenges you for wasted days and spoiled dogs in September more amply even than a good drive. There is a sense of having got the birds under for once which is highly soothing to one's feelings, as they seem to lie more completely at your mercy than when they are driven over your head.

In weather of this kind we have known grown-up men unbend even to fieldfares. The

birds are quite as good to eat as a French partridge in January, and quite as difficult to shoot. The only way to kill any quantity is for two guns to take the two sides of some tall, thick blackthorn or whitethorn hedge, well stocked with hips and haws, and slightly sinuous in its course. The birds are unapproachable except in the severest weather, and then, too, unless the hard-frozen ground is carpeted with snow, so as to smother your footfalls. When that is the case, you may really have some good sport at what is commonly called school-boys' game. Those hedges are the best which run a long way without intersection, like the thick, tall fences which skirt the wide pastures of Leicestershire, or the "long grey fields" described by the poet of Lincolnshire. The two guns should station themselves at one end, and a boy at the other, who, as the two shooters advance, will gradually walk towards them. The field-fares, who are feeding on the hedge fruit, are loth to quit the hedge, especially as no other is near, and keep flying and chattering backwards and forwards across it and alongside of it, giving you good broadside shots, though you must be very quick, as they top the hedge; and shots which you can take more deliberately, as they

fly along in front of you. When you have done one hedge you go off to another; and you may drive the birds backwards and forwards from hedge to hedge as you may drive partridges from turnip-field to turnip-field. In this way two or three dozen of these birds may be killed in a deep snow; and, either served up afterwards in a pudding, or cold roasted, for breakfast, are very nice eating.

But we have forgotten a still better bird than the fieldfare which can be successfully stalked amidst the snow. Even the wood-pigeon grows less wary in the intense cold, and when no ringing sound of footsteps warns him of the approach of man. They feed at these times in the turnip-fields, and if you can creep quietly up to the hedge you can often get a right and left as soon as you stand up and show yourself. Then, of course, in many parts of the country a hard frost and snow bring many unusual winter visitors, and enable the naturalist to enrich his collection with specimens not otherwise procurable. And this, perhaps, is the place for a few words on the outcry against killing rare birds. Now, when birds indigenous to this country, and which only the increase of population and clearance of woods and marshes have

made scarce among us, are deliberately killed in the breeding season, when they are evidently preparing to build, no words are strong enough to condemn such wanton destruction, for there is a possibility that such birds, if protected, might become less scarce, though never again numerous. But these observations apply only to a very small class of birds. There is another class, two of which we saw mentioned the other day—the spotted crake and the solitary snipe—which always have been scarce in this country, and never would be otherwise though not a single one were shot throughout the year. What harm can be done by shooting one of these when the rare chance of doing so occurs? The few that are killed every year, probably not a dozen in the three kingdoms, would not prevent them multiplying if it was their nature to do so; while in the case of birds which do not belong to this country, and which, though a solitary couple might be induced to breed here now and then, would never become permanent members of our fauna, it is absurd to cry out against shooting them. There are people who seem to suppose that, if not shot, they would remain here. That is not the case. The hard weather brings them, and the mild weather takes them

away. And whatever other crime there may be in shooting them, it is not the crime of killing down rare British birds which, if spared, might become comparatively common.

I have never shot ducks from a punt, and for flight-shooting I have no taste. It is too uncertain to compensate for the cold, the wet, and the length of time one often has to wait before getting a shot. When the sportsman is in luck, flight is sometimes very productive; and the shooters along the coast, who make a trade of it and supply the markets, resort to it as a matter of course. But if ever anything was making a toil of a pleasure, flight-shooting is that thing.

The great charm of duck, snipe, and woodcock-shooting, whether on a large scale or a small one, is that the birds are perfectly wild, and that you tread on no one's corns in the pursuit of them. They do not injure the farmer; they are no temptation to the poacher; while at the same time they demand more hardihood and more skill than either grouse, partridge, or pheasant-shooting. The regular shooting season terminates to-day; but the rough shooting I have described lasts a little longer, and affords a lively finish ere guns are laid by till next



DUCK SHOOTING.

[face p. 52.]

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August. Lord Malmesbury tells us, in his *Memoirs of an ex-Minister*, how fond the late Lord Derby was of wildfowl shooting; and every true sportsman that I have ever met with has been ready to acknowledge that the wilder the game the better the sport, and that the present practice of rearing partridges and pheasants, combined with big “drives” and *battues*, is rather a necessary evil than a thing intrinsically desirable. Snipe and woodcock are unfortunately growing scarcer every year, and the former may in time disappear from all the highly-cultivated districts of this country. As long as we have any woods left I suppose we shall have woodcock; and while we have brooks and rivers we may still look for ducks. But the snipe, I fear, will soon retire into the wilderness, where neither plough nor drainage-pipe can overtake him, and, except for such as can afford to follow him into the wilder parts of these islands, will gradually become only a memory. We will not say farewell to him just yet. It will take another quarter of a century to exterminate him utterly; and of course there are agricultural contingencies—possible, if remote—which may avert his extinction altogether. But we must not rely upon them; and to any one

fond of snipe shooting we say at once : Get all you can *while* you can. The sportsman's star is not in the ascendant just now, and goodness knows what trials may be in store for him before this century is out !

CHAPTER IV.

RABBIT-SHOOTING.

WITH the month of March almost every kind of shooting comes to an end, and rabbit-shooting among the number ; not because there is any law to forbid it, but because the breeding season is approaching both for furred and feathered game, when they are no longer fit for food, and when the gamekeeper does not like the woods disturbed. But rabbit-shooting is a great resource in the month of February, and, with an occasional duck, snipe, or woodcock, finds pleasant employment for the gun, till either the fishing-rod takes its place, or the attractions of London begin to prevail over the country. The rabbit is a most serviceable little fellow ; a kind of game of all work, who is ready for his friends in August if they do not happen to be on the moors, helps to make up more than half the bag in many a big *battué* throughout the season, and is good for another month after it is over. The debt of gratitude we owe to him is inexpressible ; and yet

we have not the common decency to provide him with a close time.

A rabbit, generally speaking, is the first thing which a boy learns to shoot, after he has done with the sparrows, and it is one of the last things which the old man gives up. When he can no longer walk after grouse and partridges, when he finds he does not get up his gun as quickly as he used to do on a high-flying pheasant, he can still shoot rabbits in the open with perhaps as much accuracy as ever. For shooting rabbits in the open and shooting them in cover are two totally different things, belonging to two distinct branches of the noble science of gunnery. And I am happy to believe that there are still, Sir William Harcourt notwithstanding, a fair supply of these "noble little animals" to soothe the declining years of the veteran sportsman, though, like everything else in this world, they are not what they were, and are no longer to be found in any numbers outside of the big covers. Hares, of course, are fast becoming extinct, except where preserved under highly favourable conditions; but conies which have their dwelling in the rocks, or in deep subterranean galleries, where they are safe from all casual intruders, have a better chance, and still afford very pretty sport

not only in woods and plantations, but also in the gorse and heather, wherever they are fairly looked after.

Rabbits seem to differ very much in their tastes according, as the keepers say, to differences of soil, aspect, and climate. I have seen woods in which all the burrows were known to be full of rabbits, and where thousands have been killed in one season, yet where, in the course of a whole day's shooting, you would not find a dozen lying out. I have seen others, on the contrary, where in mild weather there were always a fair number to be found in the long grass and underwood, without the holes having been ferreted at all. In some places they will lie a good deal in the hedge-rows and the open fields, while elsewhere they never seem to frequent them. I do not pretend to explain the difference; I only know that it exists, and that while in some woods a couple of guns could always get a few hours moderate sport with a beater or two and a retriever, in others they would hardly get a shot all day without the ferrets.

Rabbit-shooting, then, is of very various kinds: there is the regular rabbit *battué*, where well-stocked covers have been properly ferreted the night before, and five or six guns turn out, with

twice as many dogs and beaters, to drive all before them ; there is the hedgerow-shooting the day after, which is perhaps the best fun of all ; for after a big day in the woods the adjoining hedges, stubbles, and tufts of grass are alive with rabbits, and bolting them out of the fences with a couple of terriers and a gun on each side is sport for a prince. And then there is the shooting them with ferrets, which requires both more patience and very often more skill than either of the other two methods, and which on a cold and rainy day offers one a good chance, as Mr. Winkle would have said, of catching a considerable cold in the head before a big bag is made. But whichever way you take rabbits, I think they are always more or less difficult shots, so much so that nearly every man that shoots them really well is pretty sure to be a good all-round shot too. Moreover, in rabbit-shooting it is more necessary even than in any other kind of sport to kill dead. The man who is continually winging his birds or sending them away with their legs down, is deservedly considered a bungler, even though the birds are eventually secured. But rabbits not killed upon the spot, even though mortally wounded, have the most extraordinary power of dragging themselves along into a neighbouring hole, where

they must be left to die, and are lost to the shooter's score. For this reason I always think a long shot at a rabbit decidedly unsportsmanlike, to say nothing of its cruelty. There are always plenty of shots to be got without firing at these; and I know few things more calculated to disgust one with shooting altogether than to see an unfortunate rabbit limping away some fifty or sixty yards off with a broken hind leg, and almost sure to be in a hole before the retriever can overtake him.

To be a good rabbit shot you must, of course, be quick; yet nine rabbits out of ten are missed by shooting too soon, before the gun is given that imperceptible forward lift which just covers the object aimed at. At a cross shot this is sometimes called "swing"; and though it is something which the shooter does quite mechanically, and is unconscious of at the moment, is what I think most men can remember that they *do* do, on thinking the matter over afterwards. Each kind of rabbit-shooting has its own peculiar difficulties, which I shall come to presently. But I doubt if anyone ever becomes a crack shot at rabbits who does not begin young. The squire's son, who has his first gun very likely at twelve years old, and goes round with the steady old

keeper to receive his first lessons in the art of shooting, of course begins with rabbits, and, like all boys, set to anything which they really like, soon catches the knack of it, and before he leaves Eton would as soon think of missing a barn-door as a rabbit in the open, within reasonable distance. This knack acquired in boyhood is never afterwards lost, any more than a seat on a horse, or the art of throwing a fly. Nerve or eyesight may fail, but as long as they hold out the ancient cunning is never at fault; and I think I have noticed it particularly in the case of rabbits, and that while men from various causes—want of practice, or what not—may fall off in other kinds of shooting, he who has once been really master of his rabbits is never beaten by them afterwards. The best kind of shot for rabbit-shooting I hold to be No. 6, and the best gun a 12-bore; some prefer No. 7 shot, and some No. 4. Of the two, I think the latter is the better in cover. In firing at a rabbit through the bushes, one can only calculate on two or three pellets reaching him, and in that case it is necessary they should be heavy ones. Of course, the more there are in the charge the more are likely to hit him; and therefore it is that I think No. 4 too large. No. 6 is the happy medium, and is not at all too

big for a woodcock, if you are so lucky as to meet with one. The reason why I advocate a 12-bore is that a good many rabbits are necessarily killed at short distances, and that a very close-shooting gun is apt to knock them all to pieces.

In a regular "rabbit shoot" with a large party the beaters proceed in the same way as they do with pheasants. They beat the thick wood, while the guns are stationed either outside or in the rides, or in the low wood where it has been lately cut. The only difference is that in rabbit-shooting, when the wood is a large one, outside guns are not wanted. Sometimes when the hazels, briars, and ground-ash are not too thickly interwoven with each other, one or two guns will walk with the beaters, the rest standing as I have described. Imagine, then, a big wood of fifty or sixty acres, divided into convenient "blocks," so to speak, by rides or narrow paths cut through it at convenient distances, with open bits of brushwood at intervals lying between the tall bushes. Three guns will stand in front of these, facing the beaters, and three more will be planted in the ride running parallel to them. Of course these numbers must vary with the size of the wood and the length of the rides; and if the beat lies between two rides, there must be more

guns. The business of these last is to watch the rabbits as they dart across the narrow path from one bit of high wood to another, or to pot them as they approach through the underwood when it can be done with safety to the beaters. The rabbit crossing the ride, however, is the pretty shot, and the one on which every rabbit-shooter prides himself. If he is hard pressed by dogs he is across like an arrow from a bow, and killing him becomes more a matter of calculation than of marksmanship, for ten to one he will be out of sight before you can pull the trigger. Long practice develops a kind of instinct in some men, enabling them to tell to a nicety just where the rabbit will be when his little white tail has bobbed over the last rut and disappeared among the bushes. The certainty with which a first-rate hand will roll over rabbit after rabbit just as he gets out of sight seems little short of miraculous to a novice. It makes some difference, of course, whether you are ready for him or not; and the cry of "rabbit forward," "rabbit to the right," or "rabbit to the left," as the case may be, helps you to throw your gun in front of him rather more quickly when he does appear. But with or without this assistance, the man who can kill five rabbits out of six as they jump

across an open space not more than three feet in breadth, and going as hard as they can pelt, may write himself down "a ripping good shot," whenever he is asked for his character, without troubling himself about any further credentials.



Observe this quietly-dressed man stationed in the ride aforesaid, with high thick wood on each side of him, and the path itself so overgrown with long grass that the actual clear space in the middle is not much wider than the length

of the rabbit itself. He stands perfectly still, and when he hears that a rabbit is coming towards him, he does not peer into the bushes, but keeps his eye steadily fixed upon the path in front. The dogs get hotter; he must be close at hand now. There he goes, a little grey object, seen for the space of a second and then lost again to view—but not to the bag. Our friend's gun—without any appearance of hurry—is brought to his shoulder, and the disappearance of the rabbit into the opposite bushes and the report of the gun take place at the very same instant. The looker-on probably concludes that he has either shot behind it, or a foot at least to the right or left of it—anyway that he has missed it. But the shooter's face wears an expression of calm confidence as he puts another cartridge in his gun without taking the trouble to walk up to the spot. "Did you get him, sir?" says a beater emerging for a moment from the thicket. The quiet gentleman points to the place, and says "he thinks so". The beater peers into the wood. "I can't see nothing of him," says he at first. "Oh, there he be." And there sure enough he is, shot clean through the head, his little white apron

turned up towards the sky, and hidden from view at first by an oak stub, just beyond which the fatal shot overtook him. The quiet man will go on doing this in the same quiet manner all day; and your surprise and wonder only cease when you hear that it is "Lord —, the second best cover shot in England".

In the meantime, the men stationed in the open are firing away fast and furiously, the beaters and the dogs together contriving to keep a good number of rabbits in front of them, who are then driven to break cover just opposite to their enemies. Do not fire into the cover whatever you do, or you will bring down something bigger than a rabbit. If they double back it cannot be helped, you must let them go. But lots will make a rush between you and your two neighbours, affording good cross shots, though intercepted, of course, by the low bushes and the briars and rubbish which encircle them. Here, however, unless you are very unlucky, you will often get a clear view of the rabbit for two or three yards, giving you time enough, if you can shoot at all, to kill him pretty easily. The different divisions of the wood are taken one after another in the same fashion, till at

last a halt is called for luncheon; since, let the ascetics say what they will, men must eat—ay, and drink, too—out shooting, and I see no reason why they should be ashamed to say so, or to discant on what they like best. I agree, however, with the severe school, so far as this, that I dislike an indoor lunch on such occasions. One gets too comfortable over the fire, and is very apt to eat too much. An hour or more is often taken *solido de die*, when twenty minutes would have been quite sufficient; and by the time you turn out again, you are stiff and very likely begin to feel the cold.

But, however this may be, the afternoon sport will be the same as in the morning, except perhaps for the fun that usually takes place over a few bagged rabbits, which the keeper has caught alive, and now purposes to turn up for the sake of a little speculation. When the rabbits have not got cramped, they often run well, and nobody but one who has witnessed it would believe how often they are missed by average good shots. How this is I do not pretend to explain; but so it is. "Now then, keeper, another. It is Mr. S——'s turn this time. Even on the rabbit."

"Done," says the shooter; and the keeper diving into his capacious pocket, brings out a very lively one, whose kicking and scratching promise a sporting shot. "Ready, sir." "All right." The rabbit is put down upon the ground, squats for a moment, and then darts off for the wood, best pace. Bang, with the first barrel; the rabbit holds on his course unchecked. Bang, with the second; and the white scut seems to vanish all the faster. A volley is sent after him, amid peals of laughter, but all to no effect, and he regains his burrow safe and sound. "I'll trouble you for that half-crown," is the next sound heard; the coin being promptly hurled at the speaker's head, with something distantly resembling bad language. Then we all move on merrily to the next beat, and begin the old process over again.

I have said something about dogs, and I believe that, except where the rabbits are very thick indeed, three or four good terriers are very useful. But independently of that I like to hear them, and think it adds a good deal to the excitement.

Of the number that may be killed on such a day as I have described, it is useless to say anything. Many men would think a hundred

rabbits between six guns fair sport, others double, treble, or quadruple ; but I think where every man has a reasonably good chance of killing twenty couples to his own gun, which he would have if he got sixty shots, none of the party need complain. Half this number would satisfy the majority of sportsmen ; and many men, myself among the number, would go some distance for even half that.

I really believe I have never enjoyed any rabbit-shooting half so much as some that I used to get a dozen years ago when I was too busy to leave town in the winter, except perhaps for a week in January, which I usually spent at a good, comfortable old-fashioned rectory, in a nicely wooded country, about forty miles from London. My friend, the parson, was one of the old school, having great sympathy with sport, though he did not shoot himself ; and as he had no children, all his interest was exerted to obtain shooting for his guest. There were two woods in the parish, one about thirty acres, the other about twelve, of which the farmer had the shooting to himself, and which were kept well stocked with rabbits from some large preserves in the neighbourhood. The farmer was only in a small way, and never took a gun in his hand,

but a friend used to come and shoot for him occasionally ; and after he had had a day at the rabbits, I was welcome to go and kill what I liked. Well, I used to set off directly after breakfast, in company with a capital old spaniel and my friend's gardener,—the greatest enthusiast I ever knew ; and in these woods I used to stay till the sun went down, seldom getting more than four or five couples, often less, and only on one or two ever-to-be-remembered days as many as nineteen or twenty. We had no ferrets, and Tom simply beat the woods backwards and forwards, I sometimes walking with him, but oftener standing in the open spaces for the chance of a rabbit coming my way. Part of this wood, however, was the kind I like shooting in best, consisting entirely of ground-ash which, as it grows straight up, leaves clearer spaces between than either oak-scrub or hazel. Rabbits are very fond of the long coarse grass which grows in such places, while the general effect is not so grey as in ordinary underwood, and the rabbit stands out better against the pale green. You can often see to shoot a rabbit right through an ash-plant, and I have often done it, but you can't through a hazel bush ; and I always used to make play in this part of the wood before

going on to the rest of it. There were not a great many holes, and when the rabbits had been hunted about a bit they would get out on to the ditch-banks, where I used to make amends for my misses inside. In one week of four days I recollect I got forty rabbits. That was my best performance. It doesn't sound much, but then it was all done in fair sporting style, and no pot-shots. Two-thirds of them were rabbits well killed running fast through thick cover, and the rest were good quick shots at rabbits going as rabbits know how to go when bolted out of a temporary refuge, and making hard for an adjoining wood. What is more, I had it all to myself, and as I am fond of shooting alone, this was an additional charm.

There are several ways of getting rabbits in the open. Those small plantations sometimes round, sometimes long and narrow, usually called spinnies in the Midland Counties, may be surrounded with guns, and the rabbits forced out of them by dogs, when of course they make straight for the next one, and present easy shots as they run across the grass, still easier if it is plough. But the best open rabbit-shooting is hedgerow-shooting, when the holes have been stopped and the woods beaten the day before.

I like it because the dogs like it so much. To see a terrier or a spaniel find a rabbit in a thick hedge, or under the brambles at the bottom of a dry ditch, is one of the most pleasing incidents that diversifies a sportsman's life. The dead-stop, the head bent forward, the ears pricked up, and then the "whuff, whuff," of uncontrollable impatience, and excitement are worth a dozen shots when you have no such companions to share the pleasure with you. Rabbits never run so fast, I think, as they do when put out in this manner; they are conscious that a dog is close upon them, and they must put their best foot foremost to escape. But if I am to have a cross shot at a rabbit, the faster he goes the better I like it. A slow running, pottering rabbit bothers one, I think, more than the swiftest.

But it is not only in the hedgerows that rabbits are to be met with out of cover. They often lie out after being shot at, as I have already said, in the adjoining stubble, or in any large grass fields where there are plenty of rough, thick tussocks, or "hassocks" as the country people call them. In the latter I have seen good sport in some of the grass countries. I remember two days' shooting early in the season, half of which at least consisted of walk-

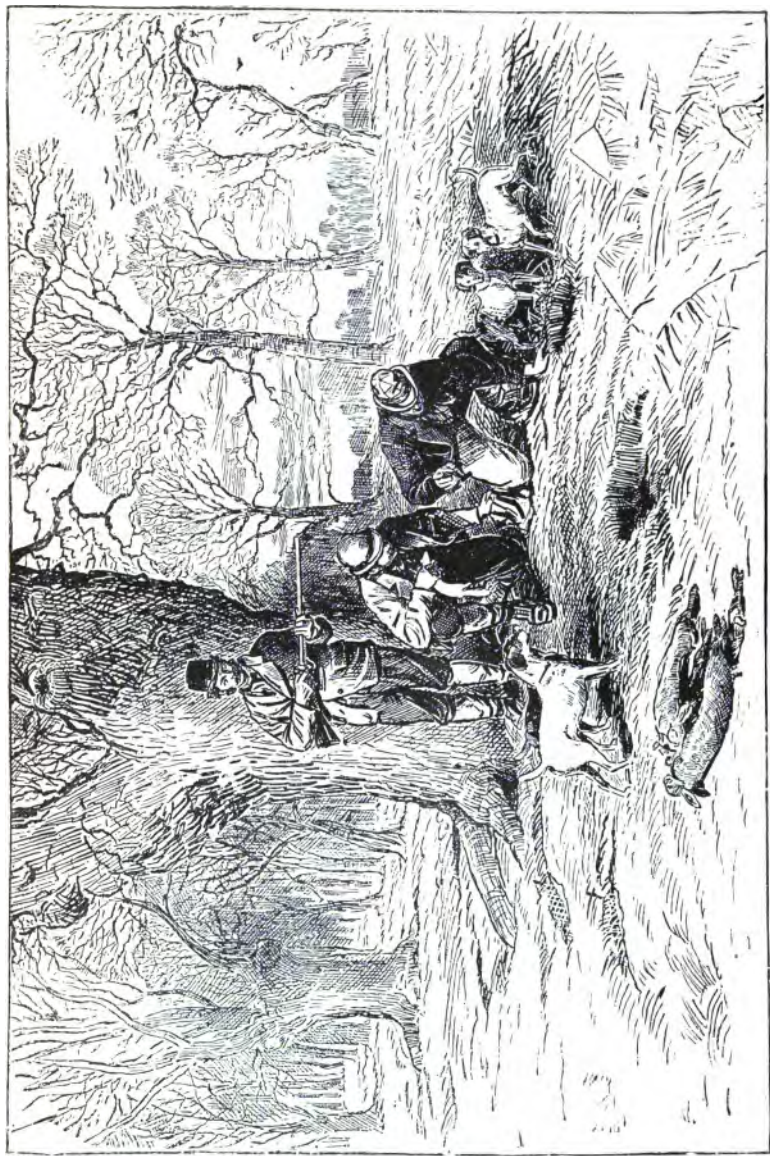
ing the grass fields, which in that part of England are mostly rushy, and generally contain pits for the cattle, surrounded with thorns and brambles. The rabbits were dotted all over these fields so thickly, and were so fond of the sides of the pits, that I am afraid to say how many two of us killed each day in only about three hours, but I should say at least thirty couple; and this, be it remembered, was no part of an estate where there was no regular keeper, and the preserving was left mainly to the tenants. This is nothing to what may be killed in some large parks where the rabbits are strictly preserved. There you may kick them up every step you take, and shoot till you are fairly exhausted. I was once told by the son-in-law of a famous statesman that he went out by himself one day in the park surrounding the family mansion, and killed a hundred couple between luncheon and dinner.

Ferreting rabbits may be carried on either in woods, or in hedge-banks, or in open burrows. When it is a good day, and you have not to waste nearly an hour between each shot, it is fine practice. But rabbits will only bolt freely on a clear bright day. Either rainy or foggy days are fatal to sport, though of course there

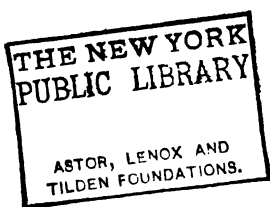
are exceptions to every rule; and one of the best little bits of shooting I ever had was in a wood in Sussex, on a drizzly February afternoon, when we had tried all the morning without success, and my companion had gone home in disgust. I resolved to persevere, and went back to one of the woods we had already tried, when suddenly the rabbits began to move, and for a couple of hours behaved so well that though the shooting was difficult, and I myself not more than an average shot, I bagged seven couple. The difficulty of killing rabbits with ferrets consists in two things: first, that three times out of four they are only out of one hole to disappear in another a few feet off, of the existence of which perhaps you were not aware; and secondly, in the fact that you have to keep your eye on several spots at once, as there is no saying from which hole in a burrow the rabbits will pop out. This in a thick wood is a very onerous task; and, as a matter of course, at least a third of the rabbits get off without being fired at. Those that go straight away are neither more nor less difficult to hit than rabbits in ordinary cover-shooting, except that you cannot choose your own station, but must go where the holes are, and that is sometimes where the wood is

thickest, and the rabbit is out of sight as soon as he is above ground. Then the only way to kill them is to shoot as you would at a rabbit crossing a ride; and keepers and others who are used to it seem to have no difficulty in knocking over three out of four.

I often had a day in the woods with "Tom" when the ground was covered with snow; and woodland scenery in a deep snow has for me an inexpressible charm. The mere combination of colours is, I think, very pleasing, the red and brown of the dead leaves and the pure white of the snow contrasting very prettily. But that is not all. Those who are foolish enough to surrender themselves to the pathetic fallacy, as I occasionally do, may see in the mixture of cold and warmth which a thick wood wrapped in snow suggests, abundant food for the imagination, if they choose to give rein to it. But as this field of fancy lies altogether apart from rabbit-shooting, I shall not explore it any further on the present occasion. We have now to say good-bye to our gun for some months; and we would willingly shake a paw with the rabbit, were such a ceremony possible, for the many delightful hours we have spent in his company and that of his friends during the past shooting season.



RABBIT SHOOTING.



CHAPTER V.

A NOVEMBER DAY'S SHOOTING.

THERE are few things more delightful in the way of field sports than a mixed day's shooting in November, to which field and furze, brook and coppice, each contribute something. We are not supposed to be beating any large covers, or to be engaged in a regular partridge drive, but simply to be dodging about for anything we can pick up in the bit of white turnips which has not yet been fed off; in the outlying ash-spinney; in the patches of gorse or fern which straggle over the hill beyond, or along the brook, of which some description has already been given in a previous chapter. In the middle of November partridges are not too wild to walk up where there is good cover and when the weather is tolerably mild. White turnips are at this season of the year the least difficult place to kill partridges in, swedes being too wet; and a couple of guns going quietly along, and keeping the dogs at

heel, may often do some execution. Turnips, however, like everything else, are not what they used to be; and there is not, we will suppose, more than one field on our own shooting where we are likely to get up to birds. To this, then, we repair as soon as the sun has been up long enough to dry the leaves, having previously walked a few stubbles in order to drive some birds in. In a stubble-field we kick up a hare, which is promptly tumbled over, and soon after have the pleasure of seeing a covey make for the turnips aforesaid. We make our way as gingerly as possible through the leaves, but the birds are too wary to lie very close. They get up wild at about forty yards; but one drops to each gun nevertheless, and a brace more are marked down on the hill. After some little trouble we find the winged one, and, not thinking it worth while to spend any more time after partridges, make for the furze, where we are sure to find a few rabbits. But first for our brace of birds. That piece of fern just by the old Scotch fir was the spot. How close they lie! The words are hardly out of your mouth when up they bounce together, one on each side of the old yellow seamy trunk. Down comes one; but the other is clean missed as he rises up against the dark-

green boughs, and goes back to the turnips in a hurry. Now you put the dogs into the thick tangled cover, made up of gorse and fern and briars straggling over the steep sides of an old dark pond, and almost hiding it from view. Here we soon get a few shots at rabbits; and just as we are thinking of moving on, the dog, who has been very busy about the pit, forces out a fine cock pheasant, which is speedily added to the bag.

And now, on the other side of the hill, after stopping five minutes in a sheltered nook for the sandwich, which by this time is fairly earned, we descend through two or three more flat close-shorn stubbles into the meadows, and proceed to follow the course of the brook for a couple of miles, one gun, of course, on each side. Here we pick up a snipe or two and a water-hen, and then bidding farewell to the brook, we turn off in the direction of a well-known spinney that lies just on the other side of a rising ground about a quarter of a mile off. To reach this we have to cross a fallow, and here we kill another hare, and get a long shot without effect at some birds. We both have our secret hopes about the contents of the spinney, which is a long, low, narrow strip of ground-ash, one

part about ten feet in height, the rest from four to five. It is intersected by very deep ditches, which, however, are so completely hidden by a luxuriant growth of tangled grass that you have to be particularly careful as you walk it. We decide that the best plan is to put the boy and the dogs into the high part, while the two guns get forward, and, as the hedge is low and the banks high, they can command both outside and inside at the same time. The boy has hardly got in before a wild yell from him—sounding partly like a view-halloo, partly like “mark cock,” partly as if he was in mortal agony—announces that he has flushed a woodcock.

We neither of us see the bird, however, which has gone back, nobody can tell where. While we are debating whether it is worth while to beat all the adjacent hedgerows till it gets dark, on the chance of finding him, a man who is at work close by, and who is considered to be either an old sportsman or an old poacher, according to the humour of the moment, comes up with the welcome intelligence that he has marked him down in a little clump of osiers about a hundred yards off. Away we go, with beating hearts; and out the bird goes, with that peculiar dipping, skimming flight characteristic of the woodcock,

but which on this occasion does not save him. After he has been carefully examined and duly praised, not without some latent jealousy on the part of the less lucky sportsman, we return to the spinney and take up our old positions. Presently there is a great cry of a hare gone forward, but she runs quickly through the whole length of the spinney and goes out at the other end without being shot at. Fate, however, has its compensation in store for the man who did not kill the woodcock. For out of the middle of the shorter ash-plants the dogs spring another pheasant, which he kills well at forty yards. A few rabbits dodge through the thick grass, but a shot or so at their white tails only brings one to the bag; and as we get out at the other end we vote that it is time to turn homewards. We take the nearest way across the fields, beating a hedgerow or two as we go, and bagging a water-hen and a wood-pigeon, and reach our quarters in good spirits and with good appetites as darkness falls. The bag is not a large one—3 partridges, 6 rabbits, 2 hares, 4 snipe, 2 pheasants, a woodcock, a wood-pigeon, and a water-hen—20 head altogether. But look at the variety and the character of the sport by which it has been procured. Is not this far better fun

than standing at the corner of a wood and killing a hundred pheasants to your own gun ; or under a hedge and shooting driven partridges as fast as the guns can be handed to you ? No true sportsman will hesitate about the answer.

CHAPTER VI.

CONCLUSION.

SHOOTING is looked upon with an evil eye by a certain class of politicians, philanthropists, and humanitarians, chiefly on three grounds : that the preservation of game creates a good deal of friction between owner and occupier ; that it encourages poaching, and creates an artificial crime ; and that it is a cruel amusement, causing unnecessary pain to dumb creatures. A very few words on each of these topics may not be out of place in conclusion.

Of the ill-feeling which game-preserving may create among farmers, there are two kinds. There is, first, the annoyance which they feel at the injury inflicted on their crops by hares and rabbits ; and, secondly, the dislike of the system of preserving altogether, which some few of them entertain. The first objection was at one time a very real and substantial one ; but has disappeared with the Ground Game Act of 1880. The second we believe

to be confined to a very small class; though, undoubtedly, there are farmers who dislike the presence of the gamekeeper on their farms, and silently resent the reservation of the game at all. This is quite a new feeling in the country, unknown even twenty years ago, and not at all prevalent now. But where it exists, it must certainly detract somewhat from the full enjoyment of the sport. It seems to us an unreasonable feeling, we confess; for landlord and tenant cannot both have the game; and if one must be preferred, the owner has the prior right.

Next comes the drawback which is created by the crime of poaching—the murderous conflicts which it provokes between keepers and marauders, and the demoralisation of the peasantry of which it is said to be the cause. It is sometimes urged that if game were made property, and placed on the same footing as ducks and chickens, all difficulty about the game laws would cease; by which, we suppose, is meant that all sentimental sympathy with the poacher on the part of the public would then cease; that he would sink to the level of the common thief, and that nobody would raise any objection to the execution of the laws against

him. Game virtually *is* property; and the owner, in protecting it, is doing no more than he does in protecting his spoons and fork. All property is more or less a temptation to crime. And the simple answer to the objection drawn from poaching is that, if it is right to have game for other reasons, it cannot be wrong because a particular class of thieves, called poachers, make a business of stealing it. We have a right to protect one kind of property as well as another; and if any such change as we have here mentioned would contribute to this view of the subject being universally adopted, by all means let us have it. Robbed of all the moral support which it still partially derives from an ignorant prejudice on the subject, poaching would certainly diminish, and probably in time die away like smuggling. Game dealers who bought of poachers would then become receivers of stolen goods, and one source of the poacher's profits would become less productive, if not dried up altogether.

Next comes the question of cruelty; and of course it must be allowed that wounded birds and animals who live some hours after being shot do suffer a great deal of pain. But we are convinced

there is very much less of it than people may suppose who have no experience of the sport. In the first place, very few birds are ever lost where men and dogs are fairly up to their work. In the second place, of those that are, the vast majority have only a broken wing; and that this produces no agony or prolonged torture is shown by the fact that birds in this state constantly rejoin the covey, are found feeding with them immediately afterwards, and, on being killed even a week later, show little or no falling-off in condition. Of the exceedingly small residuum of birds or hares that are shot in the body and not picked up by the sportsman, we don't believe that one in twenty lives for half-an-hour, while those who do are soon put out of their misery by a stoat or a weasel. Thus it will be seen that the torture inflicted by partridge-shooting is reduced within a very narrow compass. And when we consider that birds shot dead experience an euthanasia compared with birds which are caught in a net and have their necks wrung, we may fairly say that, setting one thing against another, the objection on the score of cruelty cannot be sustained.

Such being the principal drawbacks to the sport

of shooting, what is there to be said in its favour as part of the system of field sports established in this country? We shall not press the argument that it keeps up a resident gentry; because there are people who believe that country gentlemen are a great evil, deserving to be trapped, shot, and nailed up against barn-doors, far more richly than polecats, crows, or magpies. But that it affords a wholesome and invigorating recreation to that large class of hard worked professional men, be they lawyers, doctors, merchants, manufacturers, authors, journalists, or politicians, who are obliged to spend the greater part of their time in London or other large cities, such as neither travelling nor climbing could afford to the great majority of them, cannot be denied, and is certainly no slight recommendation. But granting, for the sake of argument, that field sports are a mere "survival," destined to gradual extermination, we hold them to be, at present, not only a boon to individuals, but of great service to the public. There are, in fact, two reasons, and of the most opposite character, which seem to make the continuance of field sports desirable. One is the apparently ineradicable propensity of the

human race to settle their disputes by war ; the other the enervating effects of advancing civilisation, to which field sports serve the purpose of an antidote. As long as the innate ferocity of mankind, on the one hand, makes it necessary that we should be able to defend ourselves, and the relaxing effect of an artificial life, upon the other, makes it necessary that we should have recourse to tonics, so long, it seems to us, ought field sports to be carefully cherished by all who prize either national independence or physical health. That they keep up habits of hardihood which make every sportsman half a soldier is a truism too obvious to be dwelt upon, though it is often unaccountably forgotten. And what is still more important is that in England these habits of hardihood are chiefly acquired by the class from which our officers are taken. The moral effect which is produced upon a regiment of soldiers by seeing in its officers the hardest and boldest men in the whole corps, the most ready in emergencies, and the most fertile in resources, as well as the best instructed in the art of war, is simply incalculable ; and all these qualities are specially developed by field sports. Above everything is it necessary that such

qualities should exist in the officers of a citizen army, liable to be suddenly called away from peaceful occupations to meet a disciplined enemy. War may be a mark of brutality. We have nothing to do with that. But while it exists we must be ready for it; and one of the best preparations for campaigning are the sports of the field. All our men cannot, of course, have the benefit of such training; but let us not at least be such madmen as to grudge it to those who can, and to those who are to lead the others. On the other hand, the conditions of modern civilisation, tending as they do to accumulate our population in large towns, and to foster a kind of hothouse life, which forces the intellect at the expense of the bodily faculties, should be a warning to us not to throw away lightly any means which we possess at present for promoting the union of the *corpus sanum* with the *mens sana*, and of maintaining the healthy balance of all the elements of our nature.

Nor is it only in the interests of the sportsman that we should desire the preservation of game. For their beauty, if for no other reason, we should preserve these members of the British fauna. What they add to the life and

interest of rural scenery can hardly be exaggerated in the eyes of every true lover of the country. On a fine August afternoon, before the wheat is cut, I like to sit on a stile among the corn-fields and plantations, to see the partridge surrounded by her brood, and to watch the various furred and feathered creatures coming out to feed. The air is so still that you can hear the corn rustle as the hare gently steals through it, and the only sound you catch, besides the voices of the birds, is the distant rumbling of the waggons where they have just begun to carry the oats. After you have sat for a time, the rabbits begin to emerge again from the spinney on your right, and you watch them over the hedge, nibbling the sweet, dewy grass, and indulging in every kind of gambol. Presently, from among the tall stalks of wheat upon your left, a hare steals cautiously forth and sits in the middle of the footpath listening and motionless. If, as is very probable, she does not see you, she will stay for some minutes within a few yards of your feet, then suddenly becoming aware of your proximity, she turns and scuttles down the path, till, coming to the well-known "smuce," she darts into the hedge, and disappears. In a few minutes you become con-

scious that you are again not alone. On the ditch bank, some twenty yards off, stands a stately cock pheasant, with that peculiar meditative air characteristic of the tribe, which seems to mean that he is considering which of three courses he had better adopt. If you make the slightest noise he will depart as silently as he came. If not, he will probably take little notice of you, and will presently step quietly into the wheat in quest of his evening meal, or having promised his mate and her young ones to meet her there about that time. What a fine fellow he is! what gorgeous colouring! what gleaming plumage! well worthy to be worn on the helmets of Indian kings, and to match the jewelled war-belts. Again, you are startled by a commotion just behind you—a great screaming and whirring and piping—and you look round just in time to see a covey of small partridge, led by the old hen, fly quickly over the hedge to your left, and plump down into the standing corn. They have been disturbed by something in an adjoining field, and have taken refuge in their native cover. The old bird calls anxiously for a minute or two, till she finds that all her chicks are safe, and then all is still. Then it is to be feared the murderous instinct awakes in

you, and you exclaim mentally that they will be fine birds in another fortnight. All this time the placid August sunshine is mellowing the whole scene ; a church spire points upwards in the blue distance ; cottage roofs peep through the trees below the hill ; and the rooks are circling and cawing round the tall elms which conceal the old manorial hall. Amid scenes like these you sigh for the old times referred to in the beginning of this volume, when the pretty and interesting creatures which add so much to the charm of rural life were the source of no social bitterness or political controversies, and you ask yourself for the twentieth time whether nothing can be done to do away with or mitigate these, without depriving ourselves of the pleasure which we legitimately draw from those.

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REVIEW FROM "THE FIELD".

THE book we have now before us, although the work of a gunmaker, is by no means a treatise on the construction of the weapons which it is his business to manufacture, but is a manual of instructions relating to the effective handling of shot guns after they have been made. The author, over and beyond his ordinary business standing, enjoys the reputation of being an excellent "coach," whose endeavour it is, not only "to teach the young idea how to shoot," but likewise to lead men no longer young to abandon old ideas that have proved uncondusive to success, and replace them by other methods more likely to attain the desired end. And one purpose of this work is that it may serve as a text-book to pupils, enabling them at their leisure to go again over the ground trodden during the process of personal teaching, and fix in their minds the principles that are sought to be inculcated. But the utility of the book is by no means restricted to those who have the advantage of personal tuition, for many who are self-taught—except in so far as they are observers of men and manners, and imitators of what they conceive to be the best practice—may yet find ample food for reflection in the hints and suggestions that are laid before them.

The book consists of two parts, the first of which may be said to constitute the mainstay of the work; and in this part will be found, almost exclusively, the numerous illustrations which form its most striking feature. Instead of long verbal descriptions telling the reader what to do, or what not to do—how to carry his gun, say, for use, for comfort, or for safety—a picture is placed before his eyes, showing in action what is inculcated—the grasp of the hand, the posture of the body, and the direction of the barrel; the figures not being left to the mere imagination of the artist, but the author's ideas being converted into realities by photographic representations of men in the very act of doing what is directed, which photographs have been transferred for printing purposes by the skilful pencil of Mr. J. Temple. There are about fifty of these page-size illustrations, which show how the gun should be carried easily under the arm for a long tramp, or on the shoulder in readiness for immediate use, how to hold it when loading, where the barrel should or should not be directed when walking in line, and what shots ought to be avoided as tending to danger; how to hit birds that are crossing to right or to left, that are approaching the gun or going straight away, that are skimming low or flying high over the shooter's head, or that have passed beyond him and are going away, with the variations that are required for different angles, as well as for ascending or descending shots, and hints as to when to shoot over birds and when under. The author has preferred to let the illustrations tell their own tale for the most part; and the defect, if it be one, lies on the side of extreme brevity; for the pictures in the first portion of the book are so numerous, in comparison with the quantity of text, that the printer has occasionally found himself in straits when endeavouring to place the descriptive matter in front of the corresponding engraving, and consequently, from a typographical point of view, the appearance is not so shapely as it might have been had there been more text to fill out some of the pages.

The second part of the book—which consists partly of original matter and partly of quotations from our own and other pages—touches on subjects less directly connected with the manipulation of the gun in the field. These bring up the volume to about 100 pages of text, exclusive of the illustrations. They include notes on costume, instructions on gun cleaning, measuring for a gun, hammer or hammerless guns, steel and Damascus barrels, chokes and cylinders, times and velocities, sizes of shot, weight of powder charges, and other matters too numerous to particularise. Many of these articles the reader may find more or less interesting, according as his inclination does or does not tend to the study of the theoretical side of shooting questions. But, as we intimated before, the true backbone of the book lies in the first section, which supplies what has long been a *desideratum*; for, although various authors have briefly touched on the subject, we know of none that will compare with this work for the completeness of its instructive illustrations on the art of handling the gun.

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